

How to Write a Poem

By Leslie Nuckoles

Writing a poem is an amorphous business. A certain state of mind must be reached before the words will come. It is a bit like convincing Gray Jays to take bits of peanut butter and jelly sandwich from your hand. One requires stillness, so as not to scare them off, and a bit of something pithy to draw them in, and a sideways look so as not to make them suspicious.

The words, like the birds, exist always as the edge of one's vision, waiting for an opportunity. Poetry is not so much a matter of writing as it is a matter of waiting. The words like quiet places and solitude; too many people will startle them away. They are fond of all manner of pretty things; shiny objects are known to be particularly attractive. Rather like animals are drawn to salt, words have a sinners love for darkness and confusion and loss. If they don't come to you then it is only because you are surrounded by too much noise for the words to be heard. And always, always, the words will tickle your neck when there are tedious things you ought to be doing. Like the laundry you haven't done or the paper you should be writing or the bills you should probably pay.

So how to write a poem? Find yourself a pretty stream to admire or lament upon the loneliness of the world in the long hours of the night or lean on the counter and reflect on the pile of dirty dishes in the sink.